

check. "Wha-a-at!" says I, gawpin'. "You—you are—"

Say, come to look him over close, I might have known he was no ten-a-week process server. He's costumed neat but expensive, and his hly-white hands are manicured to the last notch. Nice lookin' youth he is, with a good head on him and a fine pair of shoulders. And for conversation he uses the kind of near-English accent you hear along the Harvard Gold Coast. Cul-chaw? Why, it fairly dripped from Royce, like moisture from the ice water tank on a hot day!

"Excuse," says I. "I'm Professor McCabe, and I was only—"

"Oh, yes," says he, sighin' weary, "I understand. Something absurd about a will, isn't it? Mother is quite keen over it; and I wish she wouldn't, you know."

"Eh?" says I, a bit dizzy from tryin' to follow him.

"Oh, I've no doubt you mean well enough," he goes on; "but we cawn't accept favors from utter strangers—really, we cawn't. And besides, old Gordon was such a rotter!"

To relieve his feelin's he lights a cigarette and gives me the shoulder once more. I felt like I'd been slapped on the wrist and sent to stand in the corner.

"Maybe you'd like my apology in writin'?" says I. "Just point out a real dusty spot on the floor, and I'll grovel in it. But remember, Son, all we laid out to do, in our humble way, was to give you a boost. So don't be too hard on us."

He smiles patronizin' at that. "No offense intended, I'm suab," says he. "I merely wished to make clear my own position in this ridiculous affair. Of course, if Mother insists, I presume I must— Bah Jove! Here they are, though!"

AND out through the door comes J. Bayard and the lawyer, escortin' a stunnin'-built lady with her face half hid by veils. I'd been introduced too, and was just handin' her a chair, when we got a good square look at each other. So it was simultaneous. She gives a little gasp and stiffens, and I expect I did some open-face work myself. I glances from her to J. Bayard and stare foolish.

"Did you say Mrs. Hammond?" says I.

"Of course, McCabe," says he sort of peevish. "You know I explained beforehand."

"Yes," says I; "but—but—"

Then the lady steps to the front herself, her chin up and her lips pressed tight. "Professor McCabe and I have met before," says she, "under—well, under different circumstances. That is all. And now, Mr. Steele, you spoke of securing an invitation for my son and myself to an important social affair. At just whose house, please?"

"Why," says J. Bayard, "at Mr. Twombly-Crane's."

She don't wince. Near as I could tell she don't make a move, and a second later she's turned to me with a sketchy sort of a smile. "I think I may trust you to explain to Mr. Steele later on," says she, "how impossible it would be for me to accept such an invitation."

I nods, still gawpin' at her. You'd most thought that would have been him enough for J. Bayard; but he's such a fathead at times, and he's so strong for carryin' through any proposition of his own, that it don't get to him.

"But, my dear lady," says he, "such an opportunity! Why, the Twombly-Cranes, you know, are—"

"Ah, ditch it, J. B!" I cuts in, and shakes my head menacin'.

The lady smiles grateful and lifts one hand. "It's no use," says she. "I've given up. And you might as well know the whole story at once; Royce too. I didn't mean that he should ever know; but I see now that he is bound to hear it sooner or later. Professor McCabe, you tell them."

IT'S some attentive audience I faced too; J. Bayard starin' puzzled, the lawyer with his eyes squinted hard at her, and young Royce growin' pale around the gills. It was that look of his that hurried me on.

"Why, it ain't so much," says I; "only when I knew you was housekeeper at the Twombly-Cranes, wa'n't you?"

"Mother!" says the young gent choky, jumpin' to his feet.

"I was," says she. "That was four years ago, when Royce was a freshman. Very glad I was to get the position too, and not a little pleased that I was able to fill it. Why? Because it gave me a chance to learn there the things I wanted to know; the things I needed to know, Royce, as your mother."

But he only gazes at her blank and shocked.

"Can't you understand, Royce?" she goes on plead-

in'. "You know how we have moved from place to place; how at times my cards have read 'Mrs. James R. Hammond,' then 'Mrs. J. Royce Hammond,' and finally 'Mrs. Royce Hammond'? But it was all useless. Always someone came who knew, and after that—well, I was just the widow of Hungry Jim Hammond."

"Not that I cared for myself. I was never ashamed of Hungry Jim while he lived. He was a real man, Jim Hammond was, honest and kind and brave. And if he was crude and rough, it was only because he'd lived that way, because he'd had to. He let them call him Hungry Jim too. No one ever knew him to resent it. But it hurt, just the same. He tried to live it down, there in Denver, tried to be refined and polite; but those years in the desert couldn't be wiped out so easily. He was Hungry Jim to the last."

"He wanted his son to be different, though. 'Outfit him to travel with the best, Annie,' he used to say to me during those last days, 'and see that he gets on a polish. Promise, now!' I promised. And I've done as well as I could. I've lived for that. But I soon found that real refinement was something you couldn't order at the store. I found that before I could get it for Royce I must have at least a speaking acquaintance with it myself."

"That meant associating with nice people. But nice people didn't care to mix with Mrs. Jim Hammond. I didn't blame them for shutting their front doors to me. I had to get in, though. So I slipped in by the back way—as housekeeper. I kept my eyes and ears open. I picked up their little tricks of speech and manner, their ways of doing things. I toned my voice down, schooled myself, until I knew the things that Royce ought to know. It wasn't easy, especially the giving him up during his holidays and sending him off with his college friends, when I wanted him to be with me. Oh, how much I did miss him those two summers! But I had promised Jim, and—and—well, I think I've made of Royce what he wanted me to make of him."

Somehow or other, as she stops, we all turns towards young Hammond. His face ain't pale any more. It's well pinked up.

"Oh!" says she. "And he should have the chance, shouldn't he? Well then, he must go. And you can just leave me out."

THAT seemed to settle it, and we was all takin' a deep breath, when Royce steps to the center of the stage. He puts his arm gentle around Mrs. Hammond and pats her on the shoulder.

"Sorry, Mother," says he, "but I'm going to do nothing of the sort. You're an old dear, and the best mother a boy ever had. I never knew how much you had given up for me, never dreamed. But from now on it's going to be different. It's my turn now!"

"But—but, Royce," protests Mrs. Hammond, "you—you don't quite understand. We can't go on living as we have. Our income isn't so much as it was once, and—"

"I know," said Royce. "I had a talk with your attorney last week. It's the fault of that Honduras rubber plantation, where most of our funds are tied up. That Alvarez, your rascally Spanish superintendent, has been robbing you right and left. Well, I'm going to put a stop to that."

"You, Royce!" says Mother.

"Yes," says he quiet but earnest, "I'm going down there and fire him. I'm going to run the plantation myself for awhile."

"Why, Royce!" gasps Mrs. Hammond.

He smiles and pats her on the shoulder again. "I know," he goes on. "I seem useless enough. I've been trained to shine at dinner parties, and balls, and *thés dansants*. I suppose I can too. And I've learned to sound my final G's, and to use the right forks, and how to make a parting speech to my hostess. So you've kept your promise to Father. But I've been thinking it all over lately. That isn't the sort of person I want to be. You say Father was a real man. I want to be a real man too. I mean to try, anyway. This little affair with Alvarez ought to test me. They say he's rather a bad one, that he can't be fired. We'll see about that. There's a steamer for Belize next Thursday. I'm going to sail on her. Will you go along too?"

For a minute they stood there, Mother and Sonny



"Sorry, Mother, but from now on it's going to be different. It's my turn now!"

"By Jove!" says J. Bayard enthusiastic. "But that's what I call real pluck, Mrs. Hammond. And your son does you credit too. So what if the Twombly-Cranes might remember you as a former housekeeper? They don't know the young man, needn't know just who he is. Why not accept for him? Why not give him a chance? What do you say, McCabe?"

"Sure!" says I. "I'm backin' him to qualify."

"It might mean," goes on J. Bayard insinuat'ly, "an opportunity to—well, to meet the right girl, you know."

Mrs. Hammond draws in her breath sharp and clasps her hands tight. I could see the picture she was watchin' on the screen,—Royce and a real swell young lady pluttess trippin' towards the altar; maybe a crest on the family note paper.

boy, gazin' into each other's eyes without sayin' a word; and then—well, we turns our backs as they goes to a clinch and Mother turns on the sprinkler.

BUT J. Bayard's program for helpin' Royce break into the younger set is bugged for fair. Instead we've dug up an expert in rubber farmin' and are preparin' to send him down as first assistant to the classiest plantation manager that ever started for Honduras. Mrs. Hammond announces that she's goin' too.

"There's good stuff in that young chap," says J. Bayard. "He isn't the son of Hungry Jim for nothing. I'll bet he wins out!"

"Win or lose," says I, "he's ducked bein' a parlor rat for life, which is something."